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NÁPRAVNÁ CVIČENÍ JAKO NÁSTROJ ODSTRANĚNÍ ZAFIXOVANÝCH
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REMEDIAL EXERCISES AS A TOOL OF ELIMINATING INTERNALISED
GRAMMATICAL MISTAKES IN EFL CLASSES

DIE KORREKTIONSÜBUNGEN ALS EIN MITTEL DER ELIMINIERUNG GESETZTER
GRAMMATISCHEN FEHLER IN DEN ENGLISCHSTUNDEN

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Autor:
Michaela SZABÓ

Podpis:

Adresa:
Rynoltická 161
463 02, Liberec XXXIII

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Renata Šimůnková

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Resumé

Práce se zabývá využitím nápravných cvičení při odstraňování zažitých gramatických chyb ve výuce anglického jazyka. V teoretické části je vymezen význam chyb v procesu učení a jsou charakterizovány různé druhy chyb a jejich příčiny. Dále jsou vymezeny zásady opravování chyb během vyučování, popsány jeho základní techniky a formulovány základní kroky procesu přeučování. V praktické části je specifikována identifikace a analýza nejčastějších chyb a charakterizována vybraná studijní skupina, ve které byl projekt aplikován. Praktické aktivity obsažené v práci jsou reflektovány a jejich analýza je konfrontována s vymezenými kritérii pro hodnocení projektu. Vyhodnocení projektu ukazuje, že nápravná cvičení jsou účinným nástrojem při odstraňování zažitých chyb, pokud jsou využívána dlouhodobě a systematicky.

Summary

The work deals with the use of remedial exercises in the process of elimination of internalised grammatical errors in EFL classes. The importance of mistakes in the process of learning is discussed in the theoretical part and different kinds of mistakes and their causes are characterised. Further, principles of correcting mistakes in EFL classes are defined and basic techniques of correction are described. Then, the basic steps in the process of remedial teaching are presented. The practical part includes the specification of identifying and analysing the most frequent mistakes and the group of students who were involved in the project is characterised. The practical activities included in this project are reflected and the analysis is reviewed considering the determined criteria for evaluation of the project. The evaluation of the project shows that remedial exercises are an effective tool in the process of elimination of internalised mistakes, when they are used systematically and in the long term.

Zusammenfassung

Die Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Verwendung der Korrektionsübungen bei der Eliminierung gesetzter grammatischer Fehler im Englischunterricht. Im theoretischen Teil wird die Bedeutung der Fehler im Lernprozess abgemessen und verschiedene Fehlertypen mit ihren Ursachen werden charakterisiert. Weiter werden die Grundsätze der Fehlerberichtigungen während dem Unterricht definiert, ihre Grundtechniken beschrieben und die Grundschritte beim Prozess des Umlernens formuliert. Im praktischen Teil der Arbeit werden die Identifizierung und die Analyse der öftesten Fehler näher bezeichnet und eine ausgewählte Lerngruppe, in deren das Projekt angewendet wurde, wird charakterisiert. Die praktischen, in der Arbeit enthaltenen, Aktivitäten werden reflektiert und ihre Analyse wird mit den begrenzten Kriterien für die Projektbewertung konfrontiert. Die Projektauswertung zeigt, dass die Korrektionsübungen das Wirkmittel bei der Eliminierung der gesetzten Fehler sind, falls sie langfristig und systematisch benützt werden.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The subject of mistakes appears every day in the life of a teacher. He or she has to deal with them, and mainly has to help his or her students to deal with their mistakes. And this is not an easy task if teachers want to do it as best they can. They have to consider many different aspects that are part of the learning process, to analyse them and to find an appropriate solution for the particular situation. As mistakes appear in everyday teaching, teachers have to decide about them every day, or, actually, every time they occur. Continuously, they build their own strategies and attitudes towards different mistakes and learn using these strategies. In this process they have to identify in each situation whether or not correction should be done, whether or not the particular mistake is helpful and whether or not the particular mistake needs to be eliminated and what to do for that.

The object of this paper is to design a set of activities that would be helpful in the process of re-teaching a deviant language form and that would lead to limited incidence of this form in future. The specific aims of this paper that will lead to the final conclusion are to review relevant literature and using this knowledge to determine the problematic language item among a particular group of students, to analyse these findings and use them for designing the particular activities and examine these activities in the learning process. The individual activities will be designed and analysed one by one, so that it will be possible to use the partial conclusions from one activity in designing the next one. The final object of the whole paper is to analyse all findings and partial results again in the light of the theory and to draw the conclusion about the project and to propose possible use of the findings for future.

2 MISTAKES AS A PART OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

The process of learning is usually initialised because the learner does not know something or does not know it well, and he or she wants to change it – wants to acquire some knowledge or to master a skill. Regardless of the item being learnt, during the process of learning a certain number of mistakes occur. The number of mistakes appearing is influenced by many different aspects from the individual competence of every learner, through the method of acquirement to the complexity of the item. Mistakes have a number of various sources, and there are several kinds of an effect of the mistakes. Nevertheless, whatever the number, the source or the effect of the mistakes is, the occurrence of them is, or should be, expected – mistakes are simply a natural part of the learning process. And it does not differ in the process of foreign language learning.

2.1 IMPORTANCE OF MISTAKES

Mistakes, or errors, are often considered to be something negative, unwanted or even destructive by both the learners and the teachers. But the contrary is the case. Mistakes are positive, important and helpful. As Norrish (1990) states, there is a “virtual inevitability of error in learners’ work”, moreover, “not only is it almost inevitable, but there are strong reasons for believing it to be an essential part of learning, in that it aids the learner and provides him with feedback in the process of concept formation” (p. 113).

The importance of mistakes in the learning process is illustrated by Norrish (*ibid.*) who argues that the mistakes “can be regarded as actual evidence of the learning of a system (though the learner’s system is not yet the same as that of the standard language) having taken place” (p. 9). This can be further supported by Edge who proposes to substitute the word ‘mistake’ with words ‘learning steps’ implying what Norrish states about the evidence of progressing learning. Edge (1990, p. 14-15) uses several examples to demonstrate the different perception of mistakes when the word ‘mistake’ is used, and when it is substituted by ‘learning steps’ and shows that if the mistakes are considered to be rather negative, the perception changes when the substitution of ‘mistakes’ for ‘learning steps’ is realised. For instance the sentence “My

students make a lot of mistakes when they write.” can be viewed not so positive. But when Edge changes it into “My students make a lot of learning steps when they write.” it sounds very positive because it is good that the students learn more when producing every single sentence. Another example of a change in viewing mistakes comes in the variation of “I always correct mistakes as soon as they are made.”, which does not have to sound so strange, for “I always correct learning steps as soon as they are made.”, which suddenly sounds very awkward, since the teacher does not want to prevent his or her students from making learning steps, and so improving their language skills. This shows that the teacher does not consider mistakes anything positive and wants to prevent the students from making the mistakes. However, this example of the suggested substitution implies that not the mistakes but their correction can be very destructive.

Bowen et al. (1994) summarises: “Mistakes are not evidence of failure to learn; they are rather evidence of learning taking place. ... We learn through trial and error, by actively constructing and testing hypotheses, and revising these in the light of direct feedback and new data. We learn a language through using it, rather than learning it first before being able to use it” and he implies that “knowing what’s right in a language also entails knowing what’s wrong” (p. 47). This shows that being familiar with one’s own mistakes is very helpful for being aware of them next time.

2.1 CLASSIFICATION OF MISTAKES

Mistakes and the language systems

What is the basis for mistakes? What areas of language do mistakes affect? These are questions that evoke another question – what does *to learn*, and *to ‘know’*, *a language* mean? What does it concern? Gower et al. (1995) argues: “Language learning is not only concerned with acquiring knowledge (about grammar and pronunciation systems, for example) – it is not just something we learn *about*. Rather, it is a *skill*, or a set of skills – something we learn to *do*, like riding a bike” (p. 85). There are four basic skills that can be divided into two categories – receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing). These skills are necessary to learn to do for successful complex use of a language, for a good language competence. Gower et al. develops the meaning of the four skills: “Within the skill areas there are a number of

‘microskills’ or strategies which language learners use to communicate with others” (ibid.). Examples (Gower 1995) of main strategies for the four skills are:

listening: listening for the overall gist, listening for key details, and listening for the specific information

reading: skimming (reading for general sense or gist of the text), scanning (reading for specific information), intensive reading (for detail), and extensive reading (as for pleasure)

writing: spelling, punctuation, sentence construction, organizing a text, register and the style (appropriate use of vocabulary reflecting the formality and style of the text)

speaking: accuracy and fluency

For the purpose of this paper, only mistakes involving speaking will be discussed further and from these mainly those connected with accuracy; however, this would be reflected with fluency as well as it is an important aim for communication. Gower et al. (1995) defines these speaking subskills as follows: “Accuracy involves the correct use of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation” (p. 99) and “fluency can be thought of as ‘the ability to keep going when speaking spontaneously’” (p. 100). The language systems as specified above (vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) enable the subskills to be developed. However, the systems themselves (involving form, meaning and use for grammar and vocabulary) need to be developed, too. This implies that mistakes occur during this process.

Based on the area where the mistakes occur, they can be divided as referring to: choice of vocabulary (using an inappropriate word that is not in accordance with the particular context – use or collocation, using a word expressing an attitude that is not appropriate – connotation, or spelling and pronunciation of the word), mistakes in pronunciation (mispronouncing individual sounds, deviation from the word or sentence stress, or inappropriate intonation), and mistakes of form (breaking, or not being in accordance with, grammar rules). The different sorts of mistakes are of a different relevance and importance when they appear in various situations. It can be said that in general, referring to communicative aspect of the language, the relevance and importance of the mistakes increases with the decreasing amount of correctly conveyed,

understood and accepted information. In case of the choice of vocabulary, even a word used in a non-standard combination can be understood. For instance from hearing the phrase ‘a *handsome* woman’ would be clear that the intention was to say ‘a *beautiful* woman’, even though the use of ‘handsome’ is not accepted as standard for referring to a female. However, this mistake would probably not break the communication, so it would not be relevant for it. The case of using a word with a totally different meaning would be most probably different. For instance, asking for ‘some *gloves*’ instead of for ‘some *socks*’ in a shop would not lead to an expected reaction of the shop assistant, even though both words refer to a kind of clothing. Talking about stress, it should be noted that it is quite important feature of the language with regard to communication. Lewis et al. (1995) explains this and states that “it is frequently more difficult to listen to and understand someone whose stress patterns are non-standard than somebody who produces individual sounds in a non-standard way” (p. 93). Talking about intonation, it is also important in English, “particularly to express emotion and attitude, both which are frequently very important in oral communication”, Lewis et al. (1995, p. 93) acknowledges. However, it may convey a variation in meaning as well, as for instance the following sentence: *Linda was wearing a black skirt.* may have several meanings depending on the intonation pattern:

<i>Linda was wearing a black <u>skirt</u>.</i>	she was not wearing trousers
<i>Linda was wearing a <u>black</u> skirt.</i>	the skirt was not red
<i>Linda was <u>wearing</u> a black skirt.</i>	she was not only carrying it
<i>Linda <u>was</u> wearing a black skirt.</i>	you said she wasn’t
<i><u>Linda</u> was wearing a black skirt.</i>	it was not Jane

The third sort of mistake – mistakes of form – may seem to be the least important in terms of communication. However, according to my experience an observation of different teachers, for some of them and therefore for their students, mistakes of form seem to be the most important kind of mistakes. As it has been mentioned above, a mistake is not of a great relevance when it does not affect communication. Actually, it should be said: does not *significantly* affect communication, since mistakes influence communication in particular meaning every time they occur. One of the ‘secondary’, but not irrelevant, effects is the impression of

the speaker that he or she makes on the listener. Page (1990) describes this as follows: “Grammar does indeed have a communicative value but not necessarily in the transmission of the objective message. It transmits an image of the speaker” (p. 104). And this image may be very important as well, since “most speakers wish to be accepted by their hearers” (ibid.). Obviously, the degree of acceptance by the listener depends on the social and working background in which the communication is proceeding. Moreover, in certain backgrounds, for instance among managers, the professional image of the speaker is a lot dependent on the accurate communication, and so the importance of being correct may be vital. To resume the original question of the effect of grammatical mistakes, the other part of the effect should be discussed. Can grammar mistakes actually have any significant effect on communication? The answer can be divided into two parts. Firstly, it can be stated that it depends on whether or not the message is conveyed successfully. Then, obviously, if the information is transferred clearly, the mistake does not have any considerable effect, and if there is some kind of variation in meaning and/or the message is not clear, the effect on communication is significant. Secondly, a restricted ability to express oneself can be considered as an effect on communication. Wilkins (In: Nunan 1991, p. 152) explains this further and reasons that “acquiring the grammatical system of the target language is of central importance, because an inadequate knowledge of grammar would ... limit the capacity for communication” and Nunan (1991, p. 153) specifies: “grammar exists to enable us to ‘mean’, and without grammar it is impossible to communicate beyond a very rudimentary level”. This implies that it is necessary to learn grammar to be able to communicate at an acceptable level without major obstacles in both expressing oneself and understanding the others. However, except studying language in depth, grammar should be learnt as a medium for communication, not as the object of the study.

The topic of grammar practice and communicative activities brings a question of correction to one’s mind. When should the correction be done, to what extent, how, by whom? And should it be done at all? Answers to these questions as well as the actual dealing with these areas in the classroom depend on several factors as for instance the aim of an activity (will be discussed further in [chapter 2.4](#)), the kind or type of the mistake, the concrete background and profile of the class, and the teacher’s knowledge

of individual students and his or her use of it. The possibilities of dealing with different types of mistakes and their correction will be discussed further on.

Mistakes and the language knowledge

In the point of view of different authors, kinds of mistakes can be classified by diverse criteria. What may be a little confusing is the fact that various authors use the same word for referring to diverse kinds of mistakes. The differences will be discussed further on, but only one terminology will be referred to in this paper.

According to Edge (1990) “we can classify mistakes according to whether or not the teacher thinks that the student could correct them if given the chance” (p. 9). In terms of form, he distinguishes three kinds of mistakes. The three categories are based on the assumption of the student’s (in)ability of correcting the mistake: *slips*, *errors* and *attempts*. A mistake in which a language item that the student has already come across, and he or she is believed to be able to correct him- or herself is referred to as a *slip*. If the class is familiar with the correct form, but the particular student is not able to correct him- or herself, the mistake is referred to as an *error*. Thirdly, the kind of mistake of form when the student needs to express something for what he or she has not learnt the appropriate language yet, and uses the language he or she has already known, and it is clear what the student means, is called an *attempt*. Moreover, Edge refers to an attempt even in the case when it is not clear, what the student means or which structure is he or she trying to use (p. 9-10, *ibid.*).

A slightly different division is suggested by Norrish (1990), who divides mistakes into three categories that are: *lapses*, *mistakes* and *errors* (p. 7). By this author, a *lapse* “can happen to anyone at any time” meaning even to a native speaker, because it “bears little relation to whether or not a given form in the language has been learnt, has not been learnt or is in the process of being learnt” (p. 8, *ibid.*). In this light, it can be said that Norrish means the same kind of mistake with a lapse as Edge does with a slip. Secondly, Norrish (*ibid.*) considers a *mistake* to be “a non-systematic deviation from the language code indicating incomplete learning” (p. 128). And he explains that it is the case when the learner has been taught the particular correct form of language and sometimes “‘gets it right’ but sometimes he makes a mistake and uses the wrong form”

(p. 8, *ibid.*). This can be compared to so called errors in the conception of Edge, since in the view of both authors, the learner has already been familiar with the correct form of the language, and it depends on whether or not he or she is able to correct him- or herself (according to Edge), the deviation from the form is inconsistent (according to Norrish). The third category as stated by Norrish (*ibid.*) is an *error*, what he calls “a systematic deviation, when a learner has not learnt something and consistently ‘gets it wrong’ ... until he has been told otherwise” (p. 7). In the categorisation of Edge, an attempt is basically the same as what Norrish calls an error. Further on in this paper, the categorisation by Edge will be referred to, and the word mistake will be used in a general meaning.

The presented categorisations are based on the point of view of learners and teachers and as the learning situation changes in time, the categories do not stay the same for every student and every mistake for the whole learning process. As Edge (1990) notes, a particular mistake can “be a slip for one student, an error for another, and an attempt for a third. Or, for the same learner, it might be an attempt today, an error next month, and a slip next year” (p. 11).

Mistakes and comprehension

When discussing the topic of mistakes, the question whether or not mistakes matter is one of the first to come to one’s mind. The answer has been already discussed in detail (see section **Mistakes and the language systems**). To summarize it: sometimes they do matter and sometimes not. This depends on the character of each mistake as well as on the situation where the mistake appears. As it has been discussed above, mistakes are an important part of the learning process, since they show the progress of the learner in acquiring the language. From this point of view – they do not matter. On the other hand, the mistakes in their different types may have quite significant effects on the communication, and when these effects are negative, mistakes do matter.

Considering the effects on communication, according to Edge (1990) mistakes can be divided into two main categories: *c o r r e c t l a n g u a g e* utterances conveying a message that is different from the intended one (for instance a request of

a person who wants to buy a jacket and says: *Can you show me some coats, please?*), and incorrect language utterances expressing the idea that was intended (for example in the same situation as in the previous case: *You will to show me some jackets, please.*). In terms of communication, the second type does not matter, since the point of communication is to carry a piece of information, which it fulfils. Bowen et al. (1994) supports this and acknowledges that “anywhere outside the classroom, formal mistakes will often go unnoticed if the message is clear” (p. 50). On the contrary, the case of using a correct language utterance with a different meaning is much more serious. It is probably the most serious mistake as Edge (1990) states that “the most important sort of mistake is a mistake that leads to a misunderstanding” (p. 2).

Considering the use of the correct language with a variation in meaning, Edge divides this type of mistakes further more into two categories: the first is the use of “a correct piece of language that doesn’t mean what the speaker wanted to mean” (p. 4) (caused by the confusion of vocabulary, or wrong choice of verb tense etc.), and the second category that represents the use of “a correct linguistic form which is socially unacceptable” (ibid.) referring to the problem of being impolite (for instance because of not greeting, or not using the words such as ‘please’, ‘thank you’ etc.). This is often perceived in a very negative way in real life situations to the contrary of the usual indulgence to those mistakes that are rather grammatical and where the message is conveyed clearly and in a polite way.

The preceding shows that not all grammatical mistakes matter in communication, and that there are some mistakes that affect the communication in a more serious way even though they are expressed through grammatically correct phrases and sentences. This is summarised by Edge in three main points:

- “1 The most important mistakes are those which affect meaning and communication.
- “2 Correct linguistic forms are of no use if they don’t mean what we want to say.
- “3 When we talk to people, being polite is more important than being linguistically correct.” (p. 5).

From the point of view of communication, which is, or at least in most cases, the purpose of learning a language, mistakes (being referred to as ungrammatical utterances) do not matter if they do not break communication. On the other side, there is

no difference between mistakes that would be considered minor at school and those considered fundamental if they do not allow the communication to proceed smoothly. Simply, both of them matter the same, or matter to such an extent to which they inhibit the communication. It can be said that more damage for communication can be caused by a relatively minor mistake, or even by a grammatically correct piece of language, that would express different meaning than the speaker intended, or that would be impolite or irritating for the listener, than a totally grammatically incorrect piece of language expressing well the speaker's thoughts and sounding friendly and politely.

2.3 CAUSES OF MISTAKES

For dealing with mistakes and further work with them, it may be quite valuable to know the source of the particular mistake, or to know at least in general what mistakes are caused by. This knowledge can help on the way to reducing the occurrence of mistakes. However, it should be stated that it is quite difficult to identify which of the sources is exactly the one that caused the particular mistake, since the source of the mistake can often be a blend of more causes.

There are several items that are considered to be causes of mistakes. They are: lack of motivation and from this outgoing carelessness, mother tongue (or different foreign language) interference, translation from mother tongue, over-generalisation, incomplete application of rules, and language creativity. These sources can be divided into two main groups that can be referred to as *interference mistakes* and *developmental mistakes*. The former is more related to psychology of learning and the brain processes; the latter is connected with the activity of use of the language being learnt. How do individual sources work? How do they 'make' the mistake occur? Some of the sources work subconsciously, or unconsciously, and the others deliberately.

One of the less serious, and probably not so frequent, causes is the *carelessness*. It is closely connected with the lack of motivation of a student which can be emphasised by the style of teacher's presentation that may not be attracting the student's interest enough to increase the student's motivation. This is actually a whole set of minor factors that form this source of mistakes. However, the carelessness may also outgo from a hurry or student's personal problems. The careless mistakes would be in the

taxonomy of kinds of mistakes referred to as slips. The second and nearly the most common source of mistakes is *mother tongue interference*. Depending on the nature of student's mother tongue, the area of language influenced by it differs – some languages affect pronunciation, stress or intonation more than others, some interfere by means of grammar rules, and other languages contain words sounding so that the meaning could be similar or the same, but it is completely different in English (these word pairs are usually referred to as 'false friends'). It has to be noted that not all of the words that sound similar are 'false friends', on the contrary, some of the words really have the same meaning. This is usually among languages that are from the same language group, in the case of English these are Germanic languages. The similarity that works in this case can be easily explained by the fact that the languages in one language group have the same basis for lexis, and often even the development of the languages was similar. And this can help the students. On the other hand, in case of 'false friends', the more different the languages are, the better the theory of the confusion the resembling words works. The situation is similar in the other two cases when pronunciation, or stress and intonation, and grammatical structures are influenced. The last cause within the group of interference mistakes is *translation from mother tongue*. The influence of translation from mother tongue consists in the missing knowledge of an appropriate expression (either in terms of form, an appropriate collocation or use of a word in different contexts), or instantaneous inability to express the idea, in the target language and the learner's effort to communicate his or her message. This can appear as an incorrect word (either similarly sounding and just confused word with the appropriate one, or a word with similar meaning but incorrectly used in the particular context), or as a mistake of form when a sentence is being translated word by word which would most probably bring some incorrectness mainly in the forms of individual verbs or verb tenses as a whole. By Norrish (1990), translation from mother tongue is considered to be the most common cause of mistakes at all (p. 26). He also draws attention to the fact that it may not be easy to distinguish between mother tongue interference and translation from mother tongue since "the distinction between [them] as causes of student error is a fine one" (ibid.) However, the difference is that *interference* refers to unconscious processes to the contrary of *translation* that refers to voluntary strategy of the student when expressing him- or herself. And this is actually the problem point since

it may be difficult to differentiate between the voluntary and involuntary strategy even for the student him- or herself, to decide whether the word ‘came to their mind itself’ or they made the translation as they did not know the proper expression in the target language. Nevertheless, the distinction may not be of such a great importance since these two phenomena work likewise to a certain extent.

The second group of so called developmental mistakes is much broader and varied than the previous one. It arises from the nature of the causes themselves. The first cause from this group to be discussed is *over-generalisation*. It is the application of a newly adopted rule on a piece of language where another rule has been already applied to form a correct utterance. Such situations are for instance adding the *-ed* suffix to the past form of irregular verbs to form the past tense, or adding the word *more* to an already made comparative form of an adjective. These were examples of adding too much to the words, but the over-generalisation is also the case of removing a part of the word or a suffix, or not changing a word form to gain the accordance with the other words in the sentence. An example of the former can be a mixture of the Present Simple and the Present Continuous tense and forming a sentence similar to this: *You are watch television.*, where to the need of using an auxiliary verb with the Present Continuous tense a rule that unless the third person singular, the verb does not add anything, is applied although this rule is bound to the Present Simple tense. An example of the latter form of over-generalisation is a use of an adverbial referring to the past for instance but the reference of the verb is to the present even though the whole sentence refers to the past. This can be classified as the omission of the verb form because it was analysed as redundant when the adverbial shows the reference. These examples show that the over-generalisation could be referred to as a blend of two different rules of the same kind, or two rules referring to the same item, applied on one piece of language at the same time. The *incomplete application of rules* can be contrasted with the phenomenon of over-generalisation as its opposite. As in the case of over-generalisation two rules are applied on one piece of language, in this case, there is usually no specific rule to be identified in the particular piece of language – it is usually the case of sentences in which the words of appropriate, or somehow appropriate, meaning are joined together in their neutral forms (i.e. singular nouns, verb infinitives), for instance *Two boy swim*

in the river. Although there is no positive message about this mistake in terms of the progress in learning, it can have a rather de-motivating effect (in terms of fixing it, or further learning at all) for the learner when such a sentence would be produced not in the course of language exercise but in communication, because “the learner may discover that he can communicate perfectly adequately using deviant forms” (Norrish, 1990 p. 33). The last from above mentioned causes of mistakes is *language creativity*. It is actually an active attitude towards working with language, using the acquired knowledge of rules, language patterns and vocabulary to create the forms and words needed for expressing one’s ideas and not knowing the particular expressions. Such learners may use their knowledge, possibly supported with experience in successful use, of for example deriving adjectives from nouns and apply it even on a word where the particular rule does not work or works but creates a different meaning as in the following example presented by Norrish (1990, p. 34): “A *doctor is available for emergent visits*” which illustrates that the author of this notice was aware of deriving for instance ‘urgent’ from ‘urgency’ and only applied this rule on noun ‘emergency’ to derive an adjective from it, but with dissimilar meaning that he or she expected. But the performance was very creative as well as active – he or she used two pieces of own knowledge and tried to create what they needed to by means of a ‘safe’ way. Even though it did not work, this is the sort of mistake that should not be rejected, moreover, as Norrish (1990) suggests, this “is precisely that creativity and adventurousness in students that the alert and responsive teacher at any level will wish to encourage” (p. 35). It is actually a very effective strategy of using as much target language actively as possible.

Another positive feature of language creativity, and of over-generalisation as well, is that these two phenomena show that some learning has taken place and what the learner has actually learnt, because “what the teacher teaches is not by any means always the same as what the learner learns” as Norrish (1990, p. 12) argues. So, however these features cause making of mistakes, they also show what the individual students have already learnt. This is viewed by the teacher, but when the teacher can use this information effectively, it can be very helpful for the students too because it is very positive as well as motivating for every learner to see that even though they are making

mistakes, they have also made some steps forward in the learning process. It should be noted at this point that whatever positive factor the above mentioned developmental mistakes contain, even more positive effect would be brought by not making the mistakes. One solution for the case of over-generalisation is suggested by Norrish (1990) when he advises: “never teach together what can be confused” (p. 32) as he believes that one cause of over-generalisation is the order of presentation of certain language items and common contrasting of them, as for example the contrast in the use of the Present Simple and the Present Continuous tense, which can easily lead to mixing of the forms of these two tenses.

There is one more category of mistakes that can have originally different causes but the current cause of them is the fact that they are deep-seated. It means that such mistake has been internalised and repeatedly appears in students’ performance even when they try to be aware of it but it is simply stronger than the students’ effort. Even more interesting is the fact that there are some concrete mistakes that many teachers would agree on to be common for most of their students in their teaching practice, as for instance the omission of –s in the third person singular of the Present Simple tense. It is not easy to deal with the problem of internalized mistakes; however, there are some ways to deal with such mistakes. But not even the re-teaching does not make the process simple. It cannot be believed that a student, or a teacher, decides to eliminate such an error, and the result – reduction or even elimination – will come in a short period of time. It has to be said that the remedy should be worked on repeatedly. One more thing to be considered is that even though the aim of the remedial procedure is to reduce, or ideally eliminate, the occurrence of a mistake, this should not be believed to happen for the first time. The particular procedure of remedial work will be discussed further.

2.4 CORRECTION OF MISTAKES

As it has already been discussed above, mistakes are a natural and important part of learning process. Because there are a number of different factors that cause mistakes, it is quite clear that the possibility of occurrence of mistakes is quite high, and therefore also inevitable. It has also been discussed that they may be very helpful for the further progress in learning a language. But are mistakes always helpful? Or can they have any

negative effect? Well, mistakes themselves cannot have any negative effect except an undefined learner's internal negative feeling of them, which would not be based on any outer factor, but this would rather be a very rare case. Nevertheless, the way of treating mistakes by the teacher and within the classroom may have both the positive and the negative effects. Therefore it is very important, and teachers should pay enough attention to their way of dealing with mistakes, and they should have a clear idea of their own attitude towards mistakes. As there is a variety of mistakes (according to their kind, cause, depending on their effects, or their own importance), there is also a variety of strategies of dealing with them. The concrete strategy that is used in the concrete situation depends on the nature of the particular mistake, and of course on the teacher's attitude towards mistakes. To take the most from mistakes, it should be clear for the teacher what strategy would he or she prefer when different mistakes appear. This should be also clear to ensure that the learning process is not inhibited and students are not discouraged from using the language.

In terms of communication, two basic kinds of activities can be distinguished: accuracy focused, or non-communicative, activities; and fluency focused, or communicative, activities. The former are intended to ensure correctness, they "emphasise language learning – the conscious study and production of 'correct' forms" (Lewis et al. 1995, p. 94); the latter are designed to improve language fluency, they "emphasise a more unconscious spontaneous language use" (ibid.). This simple division and the individual descriptions "suggest that it will be appropriate to correct immediately during accuracy practices, but to avoid disturbing the spontaneity of fluency practices" as Lewis et al. (1995, p.94) reminds. However, the purpose and the aim of each activity should be clear at the beginning so that an appropriate correction strategy can be applied. Bowen et al. (1994) acknowledges: "We need to decide whether a particular activity in the classroom is designed to expect the students' complete accuracy – as in the study of a piece of grammar, a pronunciation exercise, or some vocabulary work for example – or whether we are asking the students to use the language as fluently as possible" (p. 104). Several important suggestions for these situations are presented by Edge (1990):

“There should always be times in our lessons when we simply encourage fluency. At such times, we don’t correct linguistic mistakes unless they affect communication of what the students want to say” (p. 19).

“There need to be time in our lessons when we focus our learners’ attention on accuracy. Here, we have to be sure that we are using correction positively to support learning. ... It should not be a kind of criticism or punishment” (p. 20).

“Correction should not mean insisting on everything being absolutely correct” (p. 33).

What is the reason for following these suggestions? The answer is simple. The students should concentrate on one feature within one activity. So, when the activity is intended to practise form, students should of course concentrate on the language they are expected to produce and they should try hard to produce the forms correctly. On the other hand, when the activity should lead to smoother and more successful communication (at least within the classroom, because it is different from the real life communication), students should concentrate on the content, on formulating the idea so that it is clear, not confusing, and in case of conversation (as for instance at a shop, restaurant, requests, giving advices etc.), a very important thing to concentrate on is politeness as it has been discussed sooner (see section **Mistakes and comprehension**).

Talking about fluency, it has been already explained that there are mistakes that affect communication (see section **Mistakes and comprehension**) in a negative way, and it is of course necessary to correct these mistakes (and they can be mistakes of form, too) in the fluency focused activities as well. But it has to be done in order to enable the communication to proceed and the correction should be done only to the extent that is necessary. Lewis et al. (1995) suggests several criteria for choosing the mistakes to be corrected in fluency focused activities: the particular mistake is common for more students within the group, or the mistake could lead to a misunderstanding if not corrected, or the mistake shows a gap in students’ knowledge and it may impede the smooth communication (p. 94-95). He also suggests procedure for this correction: during the activity, the teacher monitors students and makes notes about the mistakes, then he or she analyses the data and chooses two or three most ‘important’ mistakes according to the criteria mention above, and then, finally, after the activity the mistakes are presented or discussion with the students (ibid.)

And why should the teacher be aware of excessive correction during the accuracy focused activities? The answer is closely related to the question of de-motivating or discouraging students from using the language unless they are absolutely sure that they are correct (which might be quite infrequent since the students would usually lose confidence with the state of being discouraged), because this is what the over-correction may cause. Nevertheless, even though the correction is done in an appropriate way and considering the nature of the particular activity, the teacher should “transmit to students the idea that mistakes are an essential part of the learning process, and definitely *not* something to be feared” (Lewis et al. 1995, p. 91). This requires not only telling the students that they should not be afraid of making mistakes, but also the positive use of correction (viewing the mistakes as learning steps, and trying to use them for further progress) and adequate attitude towards mistakes.

When talking about correction that has a positive effect, that does not tell the student that he or she has made a mistake again, and implying that they do not know anything about the language or that they are unsuccessful in using the language, a technique of isolating the mistake is a great possibility of reaching the positive and avoiding the de-motivating effect. This means that the student’s attention is drawn to the part of the sentence that was incorrect and if necessary, it is being worked further only with that part. This way it is ensured that the most of what the student said was correct.

One more comment should be done about the correction in communicative activities. There is a potent technique called re-formulation that can make the ‘correction’ be natural. It is actually a natural way of responding to mistakes that involves mostly the relation to the content. The re-formulation means that it is not the student but the teacher who repeats part of the sentence where mistake appeared, but repeats its correct version and adds a comment or another question that would probably lead to the necessity of using the particular piece of language again. An example (Lewis 1995, p. 95) of re-formulation illustrates it quite well:

- | | |
|---|---|
| S | My mummy buyed it for me. |
| T | Oh, that’s nice, your Mummy bought it for you, did she. |
| S | Yes. |
| T | Where did she buy it? |

- S She bought it in town.
T Oh she bought it in town for you. Well it's very nice.

This strategy would apply rather to communicative activities because the student is not involved in deliberate repetition of the particular piece of language correctly unless he or she realises the mistake and corrects it him- or herself. It should be noted that this strategy cannot be applied in every situation but should be used in those situations where the re-formulation is likely to be used in normal communication as well. It reasons that this technique is not in contradiction to a very important principle of correction – the student saying the correct version, which is discussed by Lewis (1995) who claims that “the student must use the correct language” and explains: “If the student corrects himself he inevitably does repeat the correct form. If some other member of the class provides the correct answer, the teacher must invite the student who made the mistake to say the complete correct form – *complete* to help fix collocational features in the student's memory, and the *correct* repetition to ensure that the *last* thing the student has said is the correct version and it is this which is likely to stay in the student's memory. If the teacher corrects, it is essential that the student repeats the full correct form” (p. 92).

To summarise the most important suggestions that have been mentioned about correction, several most important principles should be emphasised:

- 1 Correction should consider the focus of the activity and should be aimed at correcting of what the activity is intended to practise.
- 2 Mistakes of form should not be corrected in fluency focused activities unless they inhibit the communication.
- 3 Teacher should not overcorrect even in the accuracy focused activities.
- 4 No correction should discourage students from using the language.

2.5 TECHNIQUES OF CORRECTION

Once a mistake occurs, the teacher has to decide what to do about it. As it has been suggested above, they can do nothing since it is in some circumstances the best way of dealing with mistakes. Once the teacher decides for correction, they have different possibilities of doing so. The techniques of correction can be categorised

according to two main features: when is correction done, and by whom is it done. In terms of time relating to the activity, two types of correction are recognised: immediate correction, and delayed correction. Considering the subject that corrects, three types of correction are distinguished: self-correction, peer correction, and correction by the teacher.

The *immediate correction* is usually used in accuracy focused activities. Apart from the person who corrects, the following principle should be adhered to: the student who made the mistake must say the correct version – it should be the last thing the student says and so it is more likely for the student to remember. The first technique – *self-correction* – requires the student's ability to correct him- or herself. It can have different levels. Sometimes, the students realise the mistake themselves and correct it as soon as it occurs (this refers to slips – see section **Mistakes and knowledge of the language**). If the student does not recognise that a mistake has been made, there is still a chance that he or she can correct it without any help. The teacher only indicates that there was a mistake, by a gesture, facial expression or another sign, gives a little time for the student to recognise the mistake and lets the student correct him- or herself. The third level comes when the student cannot recognise where the mistake is, when the teacher focuses student's attention to the mistake, and again provides him or her with time for correction. Sometimes a situation appears that the student is not able to recognise the mistake him- or herself, but is able to produce the correct version when being signalled that there was a mistake. It can be caused by the fact that the student is not enough aware of the correct form, or when the student is not sure about more forms. The second possibility of what to do in the same situation after trying the self-correction unsuccessfully, or possibly when the teacher wants to involve the whole group in the correction from the beginning (when for example it is not so important that the particular student made the mistake, for instance by mistakes of content), is the *peer correction*. It means that the teacher asks the group for the correct version, or for identifying the mistake and the correct version. The concrete procedure depends on the phase where the self-correction was left and the whole group of students was involved. In both cases, the particular student who made the mistake should be asked to say the correct version him- or herself. Peer correction has its advantages as described by Edge

(1990): involvement of more learners into thinking about the language, information for the teacher whether or not the other students are able to identify the mistake and to correct it, development of students' cooperation and independence on the teacher, and finally formation of the ability, or at least willingness, to correct each other during the pair work and group work (p. 26). Although it may seem that the peer correction is only helpful, and does not bring any difficulties along, Edge also discusses possible problems that might appear: several students who would always want to do the correction, which would put them into the position of the teacher and destroy the advantage of cooperation among students and the feeling of being helped, and secondly, the negative feeling of being criticised and corrected by someone who, in the point of view of the particular student, has no right to do so; however, this could appear only when the students are not used to this kind of correction (ibid.) The third possibility of correcting the mistake has its turn when the group is not able to either identify the mistake and/or provide the correct version. There is the teacher who does the correction, but this does not have to mean that he or she has to give the correct form at the beginning. He or she can only help students to identify the mistake, when it has not been tried in the previous techniques as a part of them, and then help them to find the correct version if they still cannot find it. It can be done by asking a question in a different way, by re-formulating the student's answer including the correct version that will be surrounded by different words, by providing a different example of the same language item that works the same way the requested piece of language does, or by allowing and advising the students to look in the book or somewhere else for help. This is very helpful especially because more, if not all, students have to think about the language used in the classroom, which means that more students are benefiting from the process of correction. Finally, when the help of teacher is not enough and the try is not successful, the teacher should provide the correct version him- or herself. It might be also helpful to add a short explanation to make sure that the students know why it should be that way. In the case of explanation, it might be also a good idea to involve the students, at least some of them will probably be able to do so, they could just not remember the correct version for the moment it was required. And finally, as in the previous technique, the student(s) who made the mistake should be made to say the correct version.

The former techniques are helpful when we focus on the correctness of forms but it would not work with situations when the students are trying to use the language communicatively because interrupting does not help communication. This has been so many times approved of even in the communication in mother tongue: when the speaker is interrupted by something and has to pay attention to it, he or she might forget what he or she wanted to say. So, for the case of communicative activities, when the teacher really thinks that correction is necessary (general criteria for identifying ‘important’ mistakes were discussed in [chapter 2.4](#)), the *delayed correction* should be used. The basic technique of the delayed correction is monitoring the students while they are speaking (in pairs or groups) and *collecting of mistakes* (i.e. taking notes of the mistakes which occur). There is a very important rule for this situation: the teacher should not interrupt the students unless it is an interruption to help a student who would not be able to express him- or herself and his or her mate would not be able to provide help. But even in such cases, this should be done as minimally as possible. The interruption would be natural and not disturbing in the situation when the teacher talks to students conversationally, and the interruption would be more like in real communication – to help with an expression (again, this happens in conversations in mother tongue as well), or to repeat something to make it clear, but always in a natural way, not as a criticism. The collecting of mistakes can be also done by one, or two, students who would play the role of observers. Once the data are collected and analysed, there are several possibilities of further work with them. One possibility is to present the mistakes as mistakes, let the students say the correct version and discuss the explanation if needed. The other possibility is to present some language used by students during the activity including the mistakes noticed and let the students identify the mistakes and correct them. Another, or additional, possibility of further work with these mistakes is the use of the most common ones for preparing an exercise for one of the following lessons, which might be quite helpful as well. This concerns rather the remedial work which will be discussed further.

2.6 PRINCIPLES OF REMEDIAL WORK

Remedial work concerns the work with specific mistakes common for the students in the particular group. It is aimed at elimination of the mistake. However, it has to be

considered that an *absolute* elimination of the mistake is not likely to be realized, especially not for the first time. This has two reasons: firstly, not all of the students perceive the information in the same way and with the same amount of success; secondly, repetition is crucial principle in the process of learning, especially in the process of learning a language, which is according to Beaton (1990) “not just the acquisition of a technique at one point in time, it is about the retention of that technique/skill over a period of time” (p. 42). This requires a systematic work with the language items. It is not enough to present a piece of language, do some practice and then to suppose that the students know it. Well, it may happen, that the students will know it after that, anyway, a view back should be done after some time to see whether the students are still able to use the particular language item, because, as Green (In: Beaton 1990, p. 43) acknowledges, “there needs to be an incubation period in which the learner acquires a feel for the rule”. This explains that even if the students would be able to use the particular language item after the presentation and the initial practice, it does not say anything about their ability of using it after some time, which means that continuous practice of, or at least periodical returns to, the language items are necessary for a successful fixation of them. And this is especially true in case of remedial work, where the process needs to displace the wrong forms, or usage, first, and after that the correct version needs to be re-taught.

The process of re-teaching is preceded with finding a problematic language item and the need to eliminate it. As it was discussed earlier, this need results from the seriousness of the particular mistake that can be defined from general as negative affecting of communication (it can lead to misunderstanding, or it may interfere with smooth communication), or as a sign of incomplete learning, and last but not least fact that the mistake is common for more students within the group. Once the problematic item has been identified, the procedure of re-teaching can start. As Norrish suggests, the procedure should start with the *demonstration of the errors* on the blackboard. This should be followed by *demonstration of the correct form* in all possible variations (for instance ‘speak’ and ‘speaks’ in the case of the positive of the Present Simple tense) and *explanation* of rules connected with the language area and if the problem concerns the use, this should be explained as well. The next step is *oral and/or written production* of

some correct examples of the particular language for which substitution tables are a good tool. The use of picture prompts or some real life situations may help to make this rather mechanical work more motivating. After this, a short *simple completion* (finishing of the sentences, putting verbs into the particular form, transformation of the sentences etc.) or individual production should follow. Norrish emphasizes that these two steps should be completed quickly. The final step is an *activity where the students use the language* item, possibly in a meaningful context and with emphasis on the content (1990, p. 94-96).

The procedure of remedial teaching as described above is an example that shows the important stages, however, it may vary in details; moreover, it should be transformed according to the nature of the particular mistake, the level of its seriousness and complexity. This implies that some steps may be excluded to make the procedure smoother and more efficient if for instance a problem is quite serious but not very complex.

2.7 THESIS

Applying a set of short activities aimed at adjusting a problematic grammar item can help to reduce the occurrence of this problem.

3 PROJECT

Mistakes are important and inevitable part of the process of learning a language. They tell the teacher about individual students what they do not know properly yet but they may be an important sign of what the student has already learnt from the language. Therefore mistakes are referred to as learning steps – steps on the way to mastering the language. They do not only demonstrate what has not been learnt or mastered yet but they simultaneously indicate what to improve. And through improvement, they show the progress in the course of time as the mistakes that appear subsequently change. Every language is a very complex system of structures expressed through individual words with their specific meanings, often depending on the context or combination with other words, and these words and structures have their own way of saying them, in terms of pronunciation, stress and intonation, again having a complex system of rules. All these areas of language may cause some problems to the learners of the language. However, considering all areas would be very extensive and impossible to deal with in a quite short period of time. So, this project deals only with grammatical mistakes, or mistakes of form, because even when we, as teachers, focus rather on the communicative purpose of the language, some level of mastering grammar is necessary for the students to allow them express their ideas, formulate them clearly and to communicate not only at a very elementary level. Accuracy is also important for the speaker because of the need of knowing what he or she is saying, and saying really that what he or she wants to express. Talking about mistakes, the term ‘mistake’ is used in its general meaning, however, the mistakes that are concerned in this project are mainly ‘errors’ which refer to those deviant forms which the individual students are not able to identify and/or correct themselves but refer to such a language item which the students have already studied. In the case of the internalised grammatical mistakes, or differently said constantly appearing mistakes, the students may be able to identify them, and probably correct them as well but only after they would get a sign that there is something wrong with what they have produced. Therefore they are referred to as ‘errors’. They cannot be referred to as ‘slips’ since those are such mistakes that the student realizes just when he or she has made it and is able to correct it him- or herself. In terms of causes of the mistakes, the deep-seated grammatical mistakes are originally

caused by influences from both categories as divided into interference and developmental. Some of them are originally caused by the interference or translation from the mother tongue, the others by over-application of rules, or the opposite, incomplete or incorrect application of rules where needed, or even language creativity can be the origin of such an error. Another, and for the deep-seated errors quite often cause is the sequence of presentation of different language items which then interfere with each other. These mistakes are simply developed in a period of time from mistakes of all causes just by that they are repeated sufficient number of times as late as they displace the awareness of the correct form and often occur instead of it. This happens when the correction was not sufficient and/or when the influence is so strong or the particular item difficult so that the mistake tends to appear again and again and finally happens to be deep-seated after some time. Talking about correction, it is an essential part of learning as it provides space for improvement but on the condition that it is done as help on the way to improvement, not as criticism of what the student does not know or is not able to use correctly. Considering the different techniques of correction, the most valuable one is self-correction since it is believed that the realization of our own mistake and the ability to correct it helps us to remember the correct form and to avoid making the same mistake next time, or at least makes us being more aware of it next time. Even in the other two techniques of immediate correction – peer correction and correction by the teacher – the repetition of the correct version by the student who made the mistake is necessary from similar reason. For correction, it is vital that the teacher is aware of the objective of the activity and knows what he or she should focus on when correcting. The attention should be paid to one thing at a time in both cases – when focusing on accuracy, as well as fluency. But the focus should be clear and relevant. Then the correction may be meaningful and helpful. When it appears that the correction was not sufficient and that there are some mistakes that tend to appear again and again, probably they are common for more students, too, and when there is the need to eliminate them because they may harm communication or inhibit further the learning process, there comes the space for re-teaching these language items to reduce the occurrence of them. It is a process that combines different strategies and the most important feature about it is repetition – it is not enough to deal with one mistake only once.

3.1 METHODOLOGY OF THE PROJECT

The group of students for the project was chosen considering the actual conditions (classes where I was teaching, profile of the classes). I chose the particular group of students because they were co-operative, I had known them for almost two years and I believed that it would be possible to work on the project with them. I also thought that the project could help particularly to those students. At the beginning of the project, most frequent mistakes were identified by means of a diagnostic test because such a test can provide explicit data from which the quantitative analysis can be made. The test was constructed with regard to the curriculum in the chosen class because only the language that had been already taught in that class could be included. (Note: Mistakes that occur during the language practice of an item being taught is not internalized, so would be not relevant for this project.) The diagnostic test was applied in 5 classes at grades 7 to 9. Different grades were chosen to see how deep-seated some of the mistakes are and that they persist for many years. The particular classes were chosen rather randomly – I used the test in all classes I was teaching and asked some of my colleagues to do the test with their students. The quantitative analysis of this test was the basis for choosing the particular language item to be worked further on. The individual activities were designed and reflected on. In construction of each activity, the reflection of the previous one was considered. If possible, written language products of the students from the individual activities were gathered and analysed. This was used as a part of reflection of each activity and helped with the evaluation of the activities as well. A final test containing the same questions as the particular part in the diagnostic test was applied. The reason for using the same items in the comparison test as in the diagnostic test was to avoid any issues that would be caused by different level of difficulty of the individual items in the two tests. The same items should help clearer and more relevant comparison.

3.2 CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The primary criterion for evaluation of the project is reflection based mainly on observation of the students during the activities, and on the analysis of particular written language products of the students. The former discusses the students', mostly oral, performance during the activities with a special focus on mistakes and reflect on

fulfilment of aims and objectives that are stated in each activity. The latter considers especially the mistakes in the students' written word and tries to draw conclusions about the occurrence of the mistakes, eventually about any progress in reducing it. The final conclusion will be based on reflections of the individual activities and the project as a whole and on comparison of the corresponding part of the diagnostic test with the final test. This combination of qualitative and quantitative evaluation will support the relevance of the conclusion.

3.3 BASIS OF THE PROJECT

At the beginning of the project, I had to identify the most common mistakes that will be worked with further. To do this, I first talked to my colleagues and asked them about the most frequent mistakes of their students, I also considered my observation and experience from the classes, and the conclusion was distinct – most mistakes students make are mistakes in verb forms. This was the starting point for further investigation.

Before constructing and applying the diagnostic test I had to decide in which class I will work on the project further because it was necessary to consider the language, specifically the verb tenses, the students will be familiar with so far. Since I was teaching children at grades 6, 7 and 9, the choice was not so difficult. In grade 6, the children are learning the two basic tenses, so they are not familiar with them and the occurrence of mistakes is not caused by the fixation of the mistakes but not complete learning yet. In the particular ninth class, the students were so passive that I could not imagine further work, which required co-operation, with them. So, I decided for the seventh class. So far, they have been familiar with the present forms of the verb to be, the Present Simple and the Present Continuous tense. This determined the language content of the diagnostic test – these three items were used in it. To reduce the possibility that the results would be influenced by the particular task used for the items, there were two types of exercise for each item in the test. There were 5 questions in each exercise, so there were 30 questions altogether, 10 for each language item.

Source information

The diagnostic test (*App. 1*) was applied in five different classes at grades 7, 8 and 9. Each correct answer was scored 1 point. The analysis of the test was done for each

class individually. It was divided further into six parts corresponding with the six exercises in the test. The score for each exercise was marked for individual students from which the average was counted for each class and each of the six parts of the test as shown in [Chart 1 \(App. 2\)](#). In two of the five classes, the lowest number appeared in the area of Present Continuous tense (PC); in one class, the lowest number was the same for both exercises in the area of PC and for one exercise in the area of Present Simple tense (PS); in the other two classes the lowest number appeared in the area of PS. The information given by these numbers was not very helpful since they did not show distinctly what the biggest problem was. As the next step, I counted the average score for every item, i.e. for both exercises of each area together, for each class as shown in [Chart 2 \(App. 2\)](#). The numbers showed that the average lowest performance in four out of five classes was in the area of PC. How it is possible that although in two cases (out of five) the lowest average number of points was in the area of PS, and even though in four cases (out of eleven – which is almost a third) one of the two lowest numbers was in this area too, the average score counted for each area together for both exercises distinctly shows that the average poorest performance was in the area of PC? To discuss this, I compared the two numbers in the area of PS for each class and I did the same with the numbers in the area of PC, and I found out that there is much greater difference between the two average scores for exercises in the area of PS than between the average scores of the two exercises in the area of PC. Therefore the average lower performance appears to be in the PC. The cause of this is probably the choice and the combination of tasks used since the completion of sentences was more difficult to do in the PS than in PC, the other task used for PS showed to be quite easy and this difference caused the gap between the scores. On the contrary, in the area of PC, the difference between scores for the two exercises was really small although the level of difficulty between the two tasks was different as well. This proves that the conclusion about the lowest performance in the area of PC based on this test is relevant.

It should be noted that the diagnosis by means of the test was done a year earlier than the actual project. Therefore the analysis does not include the performance of the students who were involved in the project, since these students were only at grade 6 and so that not familiar with the particular grammar items. However, they were finally

involved in the project. This happened when I decided to change my original intention to involve another group of students at grade 7, because doing the project appeared to me not possible to manage due to time conditions. However, the same diagnostic test was applied on the students who were actually involved in the project the following year and the findings from the preceding analysis were confirmed with the performance of this particular class which I consider somehow proving that the results of the analysis do not fit only to those students who was it based on but that it works in general to some extent. The results including the scores of the group of students who were involved in the project are shown in [Chart 3 \(App. 2\)](#) (the average scores for each exercise) and [Chart 4 \(App. 2\)](#) (the average scores for each of the three areas).

Based on the analysis of the diagnostic test, I have decided to focus on the mistakes of the form in the Present Continuous tense.

Class profile

The students involved in the project are a group of 16 students from one class at grade 7 (13 to 14 years old). At the time of the research, they have been learning English for 4 years and I have been their English teacher for 2 years. For that time, we were using textbooks and workbooks from the series of Project (by Tom Hutchinson, OUP, the NEW edition), particularly at grade 7 the Project level 2. There is usually a range of further supplementary materials used for further practice if necessary. The students are quite active; most of them like to perform in the lesson in any way, which is very positive. Most of them are not afraid to express themselves, answer my questions, do an exercise etc. even if they are not sure whether they will be right and correct. I consider this situation much better than if the students would be able to produce perfectly accurate utterances using a range of vocabulary, but would be absolutely passive. Fortunately, there are no students like that in this group. However, there are two boys who are quite passive, they tend to show that they are not interested in the subject at all, but sometimes, especially when playing games or during pair work, they try hard and do what they are supposed to. Talking about the students not being afraid of performance in the class, there are two girls who are usually not very likely to speak, answer or perform in any other way. This is probably caused by their low and

very often unsuccessful performance even in some easier tasks. And even though they are praised when they achieve some minor success, it is still not enough to improve their confidence. The case of low performance also concerns the two passive boys. In his case, it is often a matter of his carelessness and unwillingness to co-operate so he just says anything that comes to his mind, or at least it seems like that. The overall performance of the group is usually average or a bit above average; at some activities it is quite well. Unfortunately, there is nobody whose performance would be really successful and who would be the challenging example for the others. Nevertheless, the work with this group is quite pleasant because of their willingness to co-operate.

In terms of activities during the lessons, the students are used to work in pairs or groups quite often. Considering the correction during the lessons, in the accuracy focused activities I try to stick to the graduating techniques – so, at first I try to make the particular student to correct him- or herself. I indicate the mistake usually by means of a gesture or a questioning noise, and then I wait for a moment so that the student has time to identify and correct the mistake. If self-correction does not work, I involve others students in identifying the mistake and then let the student who made the mistake correct it. Then if he or she is not able to do so, I ask someone else about the correct version and let the first student repeat the whole sentence. In the fluency focused activities, I usually do not care about mistakes so much unless they are really very flagrant. In case of prepared dialogues that the students perform in front of the class, I take notes about the most important mistakes, for instance those that affected the meaning, or those which are connected with the actual grammar. Sometimes, depending on the type of the mistake (slips, or errors), I let the students to correct the mistake themselves, or with help of the others, or I just comment on it. When the students make mistakes in pronunciation, I always let them correct themselves and if they are not able to do so, I let them say the correct version after the other students or I have said the correct version. Depending on whether the mistake concerns the individual word only or is related to the rest of the sentence, I let the student repeat only the word, or the whole sentence.

3.4 ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Kate's Monday

This first activity was designed with focus on the most often appearing error (according to the analysis) – the omission of the suffix –ing as a part of the correct form of the Present Continuous tense (PC). The activity is constructed to enable the students to produce and in the interaction with other students to perceive as much grammatically correct language as possible. The intention of the interesting format of the speaking activity in the second stage should help the students to be engaged in the activity and to try hard to achieve the hidden goal – to improve their language – through the obvious goal – trying to find the missing information. It is supposed that the activity will take approximately 15 minutes with all its stages.

Aims:

- to revise the construction of the PC
- to reinforce the spoken form of the PC
- to emphasise the use of the auxiliary verb as a part of the PC
- to reinforce the written form of the PC with the emphasis on the –ing form of main verb

Objectives:

- Ss analyse what the PC tense consists of using example sentences written on the board
- Ss produce their own sentences using the written model
- Ss say what a person is doing at different times of one particular day
- Ss ask questions and report the information they found

Stages:

1. Revision of the tense – asking and answering questions (T → Ss)
2. Finding out the missing information – information gap speaking (Ss ↔ Ss)
3. Checking the completion of the task – asking and answering questions (Ss ↔ Ss)

Procedure:

1. Review of the tense – asking and answering questions (T → Ss)

- ☞ T writes several sentences containing the verb in the form of PC on the blackboard

He is watching TV now.

Mum is preparing lunch.

You are listening to the teacher.

They are skiing at the moment.

I am speaking now.

- ☞ T asks Ss what the name of the tense contained in the sentences is and what it consists of – Ss say
- ☞ T highlights the auxiliary verbs by means of a colour and underlines the –ing ending of the full verb as the Ss describe the formation of the PC
- ☞ T encourages every S to produce his or her own sentence and by means of self-correction or repeating the correct version after the T, T makes every S to say the sentence correctly

2. Finding out the missing information – information gap speaking (Ss ↔ Ss)

- ☞ T explains the activity shortly
- ☞ T writes the model sentence and the question on the board
“It’s 6 o’clock. What is Kate doing?”
- ☞ T distributes the copies (**App. 3**) among Ss
- ☞ T lets two Ss to demonstrate the procedure of asking and answering on one example
- ☞ Ss stand up and go round the class asking other Ss and noting down the answers they get
(if the S does not have the information about particular time, he or she simply says “*I don’t know*” and the other S asks about different time)

3. Checking the completion of the task – asking and answering questions (Ss ↔ Ss)

- ☞ after approximately 10 minutes, Ss should have completed the task, and go back to their seats

- ☞ T explains that the Ss are going to ask questions and other Ss are going to answer them (Ss are also expected to check their notes whether or not they got and wrote down right information)
- ☞ T only points or calls out the Ss to ask the questions and answer them (or if possible to ensure that every S gets the chance to ask and answer, the Ss can call their classmates themselves)
- ☞ T listens to the Ss' answers and lets the Ss correct themselves, or other Ss to say the correct version and makes the first S to repeat it

Reflection:

The overall impression of the activity as a whole is quite positive as the students were quite successful during all three stages: they were able to analyse the tense in terms of form, in the second stage the students found the required information, moreover, all the students were really interested to find what they were supposed to using English, and finally they reported the information they obtained. The whole activity took a little bit longer than was supposed to – about 20 minutes, most probably because of not precise estimation.

In the first stage students were able to recognise the tense of the sentences written on the board and to explain, with the support of the examples, the construction of the PC tense. Secondly, most of them were able to produce more examples of sentences with PC tense (everyone said one sentence). Some students made a mistake, so I let them correct themselves, if they were not able to do so, I corrected them and let them repeat the correct version, so that they produced the correct form themselves at least once before starting their “search”.

Before starting the second stage, there was a need to solve the situation that a few students were missing. There were several possibilities of solving the situation that some pieces of information would have been missing – leave it as it was, give some students more copies (i.e. more pieces of information), or involve the teacher into the activity. I decided for the last option – it also enabled me to hear every student asking the question and giving me a piece of information as I asked them too.

During this stage, as I monitored the students speaking, I tried to alert them when they made a mistake and made them say the correct version, but only in cases of

omission of the auxiliary verb or the –ing ending. The students seemed to enjoy the activity, since they were engaged in it very much and most of them tried to speak the way they were expected to practise the language, or the rest at least started using whole sentences as I monitored them during the whole activity. I was quite surprised that no student slipped to use Czech, although some of them were trying to avoid the use of whole sentences as I have mentioned above.

In the last stage I was just monitoring correctness of students' answers in terms of content and all their language in terms of grammar correctness, eventually aimed them at the correction. As the students actually revised the language they used in the previous stage, they were able to ask and answer (using the handouts with their notes) the questions successfully. I found that all the students got the correct answers referring to the content, and most of the students were able to ask and answer correctly in terms of the language being fixed. If not, I let them correct themselves or let other students to say the correct version and then let the first student to repeat it. In this case, I only referred to the mistakes connected with the form of the PC.

After finishing the activity, I collected the students' record sheets to check how they noted down their answers and I found that the written part was approximately of the same success as the spoken one. However, this cannot be said definitely as I was not able to hear every sentence produced by the students during the searching phase and so not to record all of the mistakes made in contrast with the written pieces of language that I had a chance to read all and so note every mistake. However, I found that the students made a mistake in one tenth of the written answers from which only a seventh was the omission of the –ing ending in the verb (the rest were spelling problems with doubled consonants, disappearing –e after the consonant or misspelling connected with other changes – this is not less important in terms of the form; on the other hand, this was not the aim of this activity, moreover these mistakes are not important because they do not affect meaning. Moreover, these mistakes are not made when speaking, and the language is practised and learnt primarily for communication).

Activity 2: Sentences

As I monitored students during their “search” in the previous activity, I found that they often omitted the auxiliary verb although they had the form on their handouts. Considering this, I wanted to emphasise the use of the auxiliary verb in the next activity.

The blank card for each sentence among the cards with words written on them should lead the students to realise that something is missing; it should encourage their language awareness, because when the students perceive the omission themselves, they will probably be beware of the mistake next time. They are supposed to concentrate on the use of the missing item and to find out the correct form of the missing item. The activity is supposed to take 15 – 20 minutes.

Aims:

- to emphasise the use of the auxiliary verb as a part of the Present Continuous tense (PC)
- to encourage the awareness of the use of the auxiliary verb
- to consolidate the correct form of the PC
- to reinforce the spoken form of the PC

Objectives:

- Ss find the mistakes in the sentences, correct them and say the sentences correctly
- Ss make sentences using given words and adding an appropriate auxiliary verb
- Ss reproduce correct model sentences in the written and spoken form
- Ss produce their own sentences

Stages:

1. Review of the tense – finding and correcting mistakes (T → Ss)
2. Reconstructing sentences – making the sentences, copying them (S ↔ S)
3. Checking the completion of the task – reading the sentences aloud (Ss → T)
4. Applying the revised language – forming sentences (Ss → T)

Procedure:

1. Review of the tense – finding and correcting mistakes ($T \rightarrow Ss$)

- ☞ T writes several sentences containing a mistake in the form of the verb in PC on the blackboard

She cooking something at the moment.

I not watching TV.

It snowing now.

They swimming in the river.

You not writing your homework now.

- ☞ T asks Ss to read the sentences and think about whether or not everything is all right with the sentences – Ss find the mistakes (eventually T helps Ss by asking questions to find them)
- ☞ T asks Ss what kind of mistakes are there and to correct them – several Ss come to the blackboard and complete the sentences with the missing auxiliary verbs in different colour than the rest of each sentence is
- ☞ T asks Ss to summarise what the PC tense consists of – Ss say

2. Reconstructing sentences – making the sentences, copying them ($S \leftrightarrow S$)

- ☞ T explains that the students are going to reconstruct sentences that are cut into individual words (to help Ss and to make the activity faster, every sentence is written in different font type), T does not tell the Ss that there is one blank card for every sentences which should carry a word as well and that they are expected to find what should be on the cards – Ss are expected to find it themselves
- ☞ Ss make pairs (mostly as they sit together which is voluntary)
- ☞ T distributes the envelopes with words (*App. 4*) among the pairs of Ss
- ☞ Ss in pairs scan the words and manage their work themselves – they probably sort the words according to the font type and they may divide the sentences then or reconstruct all the sentences together
(while the Ss are scanning the words, they find the blank cards, and they either find out even what the blanks are good for, or ask the T, then

T tells them that the blanks fit in the sentences and that they should find the missing words themselves)

- ☞ T monitors Ss' work, alerts any mistakes made, eventually helps Ss who would have significant problems with the task
- ☞ T checks the finished sentences at each pair, eventually let the Ss correct any mistakes, checks whether the Ss found correctly what the missing words are, and the students choose 5 sentences and copy them into their exercise books

3. Checking the completion of the task – reading the sentences aloud (Ss ↔ Ss)

- ☞ after approximately 10 minutes, Ss should have completed the task – reconstructing the sentences, finding the missing words as well as copying their sentences into their exercise books
- ☞ T asks Ss to explain what kind of words was missing in the sentences and Ss say how they found the form of the words (person reference in each sentence)
- ☞ before mixing up the sentences and putting the cards back into the envelopes, Ss read the sentences aloud and check their own sentences, then eventually correct any mistakes in the sentences in their exercise books
- ☞ T listens to the Ss and if the sentences they read are incorrect, T lets the Ss correct themselves, or other Ss to say the correct version and makes the first S to repeat it, eventually correct the mistake in his or her exercise book

4. Applying the revised language – forming sentences (Ss → T)

- ☞ T encourages Ss to think of their own true sentences saying what they, their friends or someone who they know are, or are not doing at the moment
- ☞ T listens to the Ss' sentences and if there are still any mistakes, T encourages their self-correction or peer-correction

Reflection:

Considering the activity as a whole, it was quite successful when taking into account the students' competence to manage the task without significant problems. The students were engaged in the activity and the element of blank cards in the sentences appeared to be challenging and motivating for all of the students. In the final stage, all students formed mistake-free sentences, in terms of the form of the PC tense, which met the expectations of the activity – to form the tense correctly. In terms of duration, the activity was approximately as long as I expected – it took almost 20 minutes.

In the first step of the procedure, most of the students found the mistakes in the sentences; however, a few students found the mistake only in some sentences and thought that the other sentences did not contain any mistake, and finally a pair of students assumed that there was no mistake in any of the sentences. Those students who saw the mistakes in some of the sentences could correct the other sentences as well when they heard that all of the sentences contain a mistake. I would attribute their finding of only some of the mistakes to not properly consolidated form of the tense; there was no difference in revealing the mistake in the positive and the negative sentences. The students who did not find the mistakes in the sentences at first had an idea of redundant –ing ending of the verbs. This may have been caused by two different reasons: the lack of knowledge of the correct form of the PC, and/or confusing of the use of the PC and PS. However, the sentences presented were clear examples of the PC and some of them contained the indicators of using the PC, even in those sentences, students would remove the –ing ending. After correction of all the sentences, even the at first unsuccessful students realised the correct form of the PC tense and explained the pattern of the correct PC.

While working in pairs, students did not have any significant problems either with dividing the words into individual sentences or with putting the words in the correct order. Two pairs were not sure what the blank cards are good for even though they realised the form of the PC tense in the previous stage. Nevertheless, I found this as I was monitoring the students working and I just told them that these cards are parts of the sentences from which the students deduced that there should be some words on the cards and finally, they found out what the words are and where to put them in the

sentences. The other pairs did not have any problems while fulfilling this task and very soon discovered that “there should be something on them” (referring to the cards) and that “it is *are*” (ref. to what words should come on the cards), as they said for example.

The presence of blank cards among the other parts of the sentences had two kinds of impact on the students – it was rather motivating for those students who uncovered both aspects of the blanks (that they fit into the sentences; and what words should be on them). These students were delighted with their finding and so more motivated for further work. And it was quite challenging for those students who did not find the use of the blanks themselves, because then they tried much harder to find out what should come on these cards and in most cases they managed to do so which I found out when checking the individual pairs.

The individual pairs were finishing subsequently so that I could check their sentences and after that, the students progressed in copying the sentences into their exercise books. While checking students’ sentences, I applied different attitude to students who performed without any problems when arranging the sentences – I did not ask them about the concrete words that should come on the blank cards because I noticed that they have known it correctly during the task. On the other hand, I asked about the concrete words those students who had some difficulties in the previous stage or with recognizing of the function of the blanks. I did so to prevent them from writing mistakes, which could lead to reinforcing the incorrect model or making the students confused of the correct form of the PC tense.

After the pair work, I asked the students to explain what words were missing on the cards and the students I asked were able to describe the form of the PC tense and so the omission of the auxiliary which they added. For answering this, I chose the students who did not have difficulties in the previous stages, so that the other students could hear the correct model again. On the other hand, I let the students who did not perform so well read the sentences from their exercise books when we were checking the sentences together. None of the students made a mistake considering word order and the form of the PC tense. The two things helped the students: the first stage when the students identified the mistakes and discussed the correct form, the next thing being helpful was probably the format of the activity - students could think about the sentences, go back

and check and eventually change their work before copying the sentences into their exercise books, and they could also co-operate as they were working in pairs.

In the fourth stage, in the process of forming students' own sentences, unfortunately not all of the students were hundred per cent successful. Nevertheless, only three of the students (and all students had a chance to say their sentence) made a mistake in the form of the verb – two of them used the incorrect form of the verb 'to be' (wrong person reference) and one of the students omitted the -ing ending at the participle. They realised their mistakes and corrected themselves.

After finishing the main stages of the activity, a short simple completion of several sentences followed. The students were supposed to complete the sentences written on the blackboard with the given verbs in brackets. The instructions were given orally and they were clear for the students as they are used to such type of exercise. The sentences written on the blackboard looked like this:

What are they doing?

Paul _____ (sing).

Lucy _____ (draw) a picture.

Ann _____ (not, run).

John _____ (watch TV).

Tom _____ (not, play) the guitar.

The students wrote the completed sentences on a loose sheet of paper (App. 5) which I collected to analyse and to compare their performance during the activity and in the follow-up exercise.

The comparison cannot be precise because there are no numbers and accurate data collected from the main activity and the comparison can be done only on the base of the reflection of the activity, but this can be compared with concrete numbers from the analysis of the follow-up exercise. As it is flowing from the reflection of the activity above, the percentage of achievement would be quite high, I would rate it between 70 % and 80 %. The success of the last stage, when the students formed their own sentences and almost did not make mistakes, or realised the mistake and corrected themselves, could be rated at almost 90 %. The analysis of the students' written materials shows that

total percentage of correct answers (from all answers from all students) is almost 70 %. (This number does not include the mistake in not doubling the consonant in the participle, which would restrict the percentage to 60 %, because only three out of fourteen students doubled the consonant.) Considering the achievement of individual students, two thirds from the whole group gained 80 % or 100 % of correct answers, these two results go halves. (As in the previous case, this number does not include the mistake in the participle.)

Both numbers from the analysis of students' written work can be compared as convergent in contrast to the number from the main activity – the difference in its highest range is 25 %, in its lowest range it is still more than 10 %. Even though the numbers referring to the main activity are based only on estimations, the average difference in achievement between the main and follow-up activity of almost 18 % is quite high. There are probably two main causes of this difference. The first is different approach of students towards the language when speaking and when writing. The second, and perhaps the more important one, is the fact that the teacher's notion of an activity being fulfilled among the whole group of students, especially more when the students are co-operating is usually better than the notion of the performance of every individual in the group. And not only the notion of the performance of the group, but the performance itself, is better than the sum of results of work of individual students. Then the difference between the two percentages discussed above appears to be natural.

Considering the difference again what if the numbers would be the same (let say at the lower level)? It would mean that all the students are at the similar level and that there would not be the power from inside the group that would lead the others towards the improvement. Therefore, I think of it as at least a positive feature in the process of learning and improving the language. Nevertheless, it cannot be considered only positive, it shows that there is the space for further improvement. One important thing to be considered at this point is the fact that such a quite big "non-success" came after a series of consequent partial activities aimed at the improvement of a specific language item – the correct form of the PC tense. However, I hope that at this point it only indicates that one or two activities are not enough to reduce the occurrence of mistakes significantly.

Activity 3: Free Time Battleships

Similarly to the first activity, this one is constructed with emphasis on communication, because it is probably the most effective way to put the accuracy practice in context of the use of the language; and such activities are also more motivating for the students. The communicative factor here is achieved by means of a well-known game which is quite popular among the students.

Unlike the first two activities, this activity focuses mainly on questions to cover all forms of the PC. Considering the analysis of the previous activity, I included the third stage of using the information from the game so that the students work with statements in PC again. Moreover, the connection between questions and answers (statements) will be reinforced.

Aims:

- to revise the form of questions and short answers in the Present Continuous tense (PC)
- to reinforce the spoken form of questions in the PC
- to consolidate the written form of the PC

Objectives:

- Ss answer T's questions by means of short answers, Ss ask their classmates other questions to answer using model sentences
- Ss ask questions about different children and their activity at the particular moment
- Ss use the gained information and write about the different children's activities

Stages:

1. Asking and answering questions ($T \rightarrow Ss, Ss \leftrightarrow Ss$)
2. Playing game (battleships) – asking and answering questions ($S \leftrightarrow S$)
3. Using the obtained information – writing sentences (S)

Procedure:

1. Asking and answering questions ($T \rightarrow Ss, Ss \leftrightarrow Ss$)

- ☞ T asks Ss questions about their classmates, e.g. *Is Lukáš sitting on a chair?* – Ss answer
- ☞ at the beginning of asking T writes two of the questions with the corresponding answers of the Ss on the blackboard as a model for the Ss e.g. *Is Lukáš sitting on a chair?* – Yes, he is.
Is Verča swimming? – No, she isn't.
- ☞ Ss ask similar questions and the other Ss answer – T makes sure that every S asks a question
- ☞ T indicates possible mistakes and lets the Ss correct themselves or lets another S to correct the mistake and the first S repeats the correct version

2. Playing game (battleships) – asking and answering questions (S ↔ S)

- ☞ T explains the activity shortly
- ☞ Ss make pairs (mostly as they sit together which is voluntary)
- ☞ T distributes the copies (App. 7) with grids for playing the battleships
- ☞ Ss draw their ships in one of the grids
- ☞ Ss ask questions in pairs and note down the answers of their partner in the second grid to find their partner's ship
- ☞ T monitors Ss while they are asking questions in pairs, eventually helps them if they have any problems or indicates any significant mistakes and lets the Ss correct themselves (if the S cannot correct him- or herself, the T does so)
- ☞ Ss compare their ships in pairs, eventually correct their findings when they finished asking
- ☞ T asks each pair about the winner – who was the first to find the partner's ship – the winner from each pair gets a bonus picture (Ss are familiar with)

3. Using the obtained information – writing sentences (S)

- ☞ each S writes sentences about the “partner's” children
- ☞ T collects the copies from the Ss

Reflection:

The course of the activity was quite smooth, since there were no significant problems. All students were engaged in the activity very much, they did quite well in all the three stages. During the game, the students seemed to appreciate it very much. When writing the sentences in the last stage, students were able to either produce them without mistakes, or to identify and correct the mistakes in most cases. The whole activity took about 15 minutes as I expected.

In the first stage, students were able to answer my questions without any problems. Then, as model questions and answers were written on the blackboard, most students were able to ask their own questions without problems and they formed them correctly; however, three students made a mistake – they omitted the –ing ending of the participle. This was the case of the students who tend to show lower performance. Nevertheless, when the mistake appeared, I indicated their mistake by repeating the beginning of their question and let them correct themselves. If they could not do that, I pointed at the blackboard and then they were able to form the question correctly. None of the students had problems with the answers.

Talking about the second stage – the game itself, firstly I would mention that the students enjoyed playing this game (battleships) because they are familiar with it and they enjoy playing it in their real lives, too. (But I have to admit that this was not intentional – the intention was only the use of *a* game, I did not choose particularly this one according to the students' preference.) However, it was quite motivating for them to be allowed to play such a game during the lesson. They do not consider such activities as learning which makes their use of language more automatic as they concentrate rather on the game, or other communication, itself than on the use of the language. At the beginning of this stage, several students had difficulties to draw their ship as the shape of it was given and it was different from the shapes the students are used to in this game. So, this was a bit confusing for the students even though the shape was drawn on their handouts and I also drew their attention to this fact before starting the game. To comment on the choice of the ship's shape, the reason for it was the possibility of combining different activities and different children. When meeting the problem of drawing their ships, the students asked me and I showed them – drawing a picture on

the blackboard – what the shape of their ship should be like. Then the students seemed to understand it clearly. And except one student, they drew their ships as they were supposed to. But I did not do anything about this one case because I did not find it until I collected the students' handouts and saw it. During the game, I monitored the students and listened to how they asked questions, how they were able to form the questions and considering the utterances I could hear, most of the students formed perfectly correct questions. However, I of course did not hear all the language produced by them. If the students made a mistake that I heard (it was in four cases), I indicated it by means of a facial expression or a questioning tone. Then, all of the students who were in this situation tried to put their question right and most of them were really able to correct their questions themselves. One of these students could not, so I drew his attention to the handout, particularly to the example of a question. Then using the example, he was able to correct himself. As I was monitoring the students, I also noticed two or three times that the students corrected their partners although they are not used to doing this during the pair or group work. This was the case of the students who usually perform quite well. The last thing to mention here is that both students in the pair were expected to finish the quest for the partner's ship to ensure two things – that all students get the same chance to practise the language, and that all students will have the data for doing the follow-up activity.

After finishing the game and comparing the ships in pairs, students moved onto doing the follow-up exercise. The first thing to be noticed here is that as the individual pairs were finishing gradually with the game, they started with the last stage gradually as well. Assessing the last stage, or actually the students' written pieces of language, I should mention that as I was monitoring the other students who were still playing the game, I took a look at the students doing the final exercise and noticed some mistakes in their writing. When most of the students were finishing, I suggested that they read their sentences before they hand it in. I did not say anything about mistakes and I often say this when testing, but I was quite surprised that it worked because most of the students are rarely able to identify the mistakes in their own tests. However, this time, they realized he form and quite a large number of students corrected the mistakes. Using the numbers, 8 out of 15 students managed to produce absolutely correct sentences.

In 6 cases out of these 8, it is possible to identify that the student found and corrected a mistake (at some of them, forms in all four sentences were corrected; in some cases, there was only one sentence to be corrected). The other students made at least one mistake, in 2 cases – all of the sentences contain a mistake in the form of PC. Considering the mistakes that occurred (including those that were corrected by the students themselves), except one (that was the omission of –ing ending of the participle), all of them were omissions of the auxiliary verb. This is a quite negative result since the previous activity was aimed at the use of the auxiliary verb. However, there are two positive things about this: almost half of the students were able to identify and correct the mistake, which shows that they are aware of the use of it; the second one makes the impression of the result little bit better – among the students who did not identify and/or did not correct their mistake(s), most of them made a mistake in one sentence only. This shows two things: the positive one is that they have an idea about using an auxiliary verb with the PC and that they are mostly able to use it, the rather negative one is that they still are quite inconsistent in using it. However, the fact that the students are aware of the mistake indicates some progress. To have a look at the reasons of appearing the mistake again after a relatively successful preceding activity aimed at the particular form, I should remember the ambiguous conclusion about the previous activity – however good the students' performance in it seemed to be, the analysis of the follow-up simple completion exercise did not show so much success. And this probably appeared in this activity – not fully removed the bad habit and not fully internalized correct structure. However, as it has been discussed above, at least the awareness was raised. Still, it shows that further practice and production of the structure is necessary.

Coming back to the main focus of this activity, the mistakes in questions should be discussed. As I have already mentioned, I could not hear all language produced by the students during the game; however, the mistakes I noticed consisted usually in wrong word order, not in the omission of the auxiliary or the –ing ending of the participle. This indicates that students are aware of the use of auxiliary in questions even though they tend to omit it in the statements, which proves that this is the area that should be worked further on since the mistakes in questions were rather rare. Moreover, the effect on communication of the wrong word order in questions with the appropriate

questioning intonation may not be as harmful as the effect of not using the auxiliary verb because then the reference to PS or PC would possibly not be clear.

Activity 4: Afternoon Puzzle

Considering the outcomes of the previous activity which showed that further attention should be paid to the use of auxiliary verb to get the correct form of the PC, this activity is aimed at this feature again. (Note: The sentences in the first stage are taken from the students' pieces of writing from the previous activity.) It also covers the use of questions in the form of the PC as there were some, even though minor, mistakes in this area as well. Similarly to the first activity it involves the information gap that makes the activity meaningful in terms of communication. Secondly, it involves the memory in the last stage which is a feature that challenges the students.

Aims:

- to emphasize the use of the auxiliary verb as a part of the Present Continuous tense (PC)
- to consolidate the spoken form of questions in the PC
- to reinforce the spoken form of statements in the PC
- to consolidate the written form of the PC

Objectives:

- Ss find the mistakes in the sentences, correct them and say the sentences correctly
- Ss ask and say about different children and their activity at the particular moment
- Ss use the gained information and write about the different children's activities as they can remember it

Stages:

1. Review of the tense – finding and correcting mistakes ($T \rightarrow Ss$)
2. Finding out the missing information – information gap speaking ($S \leftrightarrow S$)
3. Using the obtained information – writing sentences (S)

Procedure:

1. Review of the tense – finding and correcting mistakes ($T \rightarrow Ss$)
 - ☛ T writes several sentences containing a mistake in the form of the verb in PC on the blackboard

John running.

Is Paul drawing a picture.

Ann is sing.

Paul playing the guitar.

- ☞ T asks Ss to read the sentences and think about whether or not everything is all right with the sentences – Ss find the mistakes (eventually T helps Ss by asking questions to find them)
- ☞ T asks Ss what kind of mistakes are there and to correct them – several Ss come to the blackboard and correct the sentences
- ☞ T asks Ss to summarise what the PC tense consists of – Ss say

2. Finding out the missing information – information gap speaking (S ↔ S)

- ☞ T explains the activity shortly
- ☞ Ss make pairs (mostly as they sit together which is voluntary)
- ☞ T distributes the copies (*App. 7*) with different information for student A and student B
- ☞ Ss ask questions in pairs and note down the answers of their partner in their handouts
- ☞ T monitors Ss while they are asking questions in pairs, eventually helps them if they have any problems
- ☞ after finishing the pair work, Ss ask questions in the whole group and check their notes whether or not they got and wrote down correct (in terms of content) information

3. Using the obtained information – writing sentences (S)

- ☞ T distributes the copies (*App. 8*) with names and clues (activities) of the children from the previous stage
- ☞ each S writes sentences about all children as they can remember it using given clues (they are encouraged to guess if they cannot remember)
- ☞ T collects the copies from the Ss

Reflection:

Considering the impression of this activity, it would be rather double-faced. The two stages involving the whole-group work and the following pair work were quite

successful, students co-operated and during the pair work they were engaged in the activity and worked hard. They were also challenged with the last task even though they were surprised in a rather negative way, since they were afraid of not remembering all the information. So, in terms of involvement of the students and their interest in the tasks, it was successful. On the contrary, in terms of performance and in comparison with the three previous activities, it was rather unsuccessful. Considering that so far the most of the language practise (compared to the previous activities) has been done, this activity seems to be the least successful although the level of success would be similar to the other activities.

In the first stage, students were able to identify different kinds of mistakes in the form of the PC. They even proposed the two possibilities for the second sentence – to put a question mark at the end as it is a question, or to change the word order of the auxiliary verb and the proper noun to form a correct statement. Then, they were also able to describe the basic rules for PC and provide some examples. This time, not all of the students were involved in this activity, or not actively. This could be one cause of the future problems.

During the second stage, the students asked questions in pairs and noted down the information they gained from their partners. As I was monitoring them, I noticed some mistakes. It was in about a quarter of cases. The most frequent mistake was the omission of the auxiliary verb. However, this time, I did not want to interrupt the flow of communication, so I did not stop the students for the correction unless they asked for help on their own. However, I have noticed also something positive – some of the students were aware of mistakes of their partners and corrected them, which was quite helpful. To discuss some possible causes of continuous occurrence of the mistakes, I have to mention the material students were working with. As I supposed that the students have been so far familiar with the form of the PC, I did not write the auxiliary verb on the handout, except the example sentence where it was highlighted. Moreover, I expected that this could raise the students' awareness of the use of the auxiliary verb but it seems to work the other way. The next reason could be just the fact that the students were so much involved in thinking about the content, even though this activity does not require it to such an extent. However, this could be the reason of the poorer

performance of the students in the last activity. Students liked the task to recall the children's activities and write about them even though they were not sure with the answers but it was a challenge for them. Analyzing the students' written language, half of the students got the sentences absolutely correct, the other half made mistakes in omission of the auxiliary verb as well as the -ing ending. As it has been discussed above, this result would be actually quite nice in the previous activities, but is rather unsatisfactory in the last from a set of activities that should help to reduce such mistakes. Another reason is probably the fact that the result of the comparison of spoken and written language unless the written language is perfect, shows worse performance for the written language because in that situation the students produce the language on their own, do not co-operate and do not get any instant support from other students or the teacher, moreover the teacher can notice every mistake that occurs which is a lot different from speaking.

However, the students have made certain progress, at least in being aware of the mistakes and their identification if not of not making them. To conclude, this activity was similarly, or a bit less, successful than the others but considering the fact that it was the last one, the expected results should be better than those achieved. This implies that there is still space for improvement, even though some progress has been achieved. And it is always motivating for the teacher to help improving the language at least at one student.

4 CONCLUSION

Mistakes are often viewed very negatively by both students and their teachers. But mistakes are not negative. They are positive as they demonstrate certain progress in learning and as they are the evidence of something being learnt. Therefore mistakes should not be considered anything improper. There should always be effort to take as many advantages of mistakes as possible – they provide learners with space for improvement which, if presented and/or perceived positively, may be motivating as well as challenging for learners – they would like to take more practice to improve their knowledge of the language. Moreover, mistakes prove that learning is taking place – there are no mistakes without learning. And there is one more positive feature of mistakes – they help learners being more aware of the language and although the same mistake possibly appears again, it still raises the language awareness. For instance when the student was not able to identify the mistake for the first time it appeared, he or she may be able to do so when the same mistake occurs in future. And this is a step forward in the process of improving. On the other hand, it has to be said that however positive features mistakes have and should be treated positively; it does not mean that mistakes do not matter at all and that there should be no concern about them. A proverb says that best friends make those transformed from the enemies. Why not doing this with mistakes? Learners should not be frightened of making mistakes since making mistakes is natural. Learners can make mistakes; they are even expected to make mistakes – because it *is* natural. But there is always a need to do something about the mistakes. The ‘what’ to do about mistakes depends on the aim of the activity and is related to correction of mistakes. Sometimes, the best option is doing nothing – mainly in fluency focused, communicative activities or in real communication with students as for instance their apologies for coming late, not bringing their homework etc. unless the correction would be natural, like in real communication, for instance by means of repeating the student’s sentence correctly turning it to a question to find out whether or not the idea was understood clearly. On the other hand, sometimes it is necessary to correct the mistake. Still talking about fluency activities, when correction is necessary, it should be done afterwards. The teacher, or possibly a student, monitors students and collects the mistakes he or she identifies, and the most important ones are presented to

the students after the activity and discussed. When talking about accuracy, when this is the aim of an activity, it is usually the best way to do it straightaway, but there are several techniques from self-correction of the students, which is the most effective one, concerning the peer-correction too, and finally, the correction by the teacher when the two preceding techniques did not work. In all of these techniques, it should always be bared in mind that the students who made the mistake must say the correct version. The importance of accuracy outgoes from the necessity of gaining a satisfactory level of competence to use the language and to express one's ideas clearly, not only at a very elementary level. Another reason for correction is that the mistakes may cause misunderstanding, this concerns the deviant form that makes the confusion, or a correct language utterance that does not explicitly shows that something is wrong, but the content is different from the intended one. Being concerned with mistakes of form, the stronger need to do something about the mistakes is at those, that are deep-seated, because they can cause misunderstandings, they can have a negative effect on what will be learnt further, or they can restrict the students' ability to express their ideas. The process that deals with deep-seated mistakes is the remedial teaching. It is a series of connected one after another following activities concerning one, or one kind, of a mistake and trying to reduce the possibility of its further appearance. It is usually not enough to apply one series of such activities to help the students to avoid the mistake in future. The repetitious application of such series of activities is necessary.

Before doing the remedial work, it is always necessary to identify the mistake that tends to appear again and again. For the purpose of my project, I did this by means of a diagnostic test which showed me the problematic point and further, I was dealing with mistakes of forms of the Present Continuous tense (PC). Several activities, or series of activities, were designed and used with a specific group of students; these activities were reflected considering mainly the students' performance.

The particular, and partial, results of the individual activities showed that some improvement was reached in each activity. The students were mostly performing in the expected way; they produced not so many mistakes even though they were some mistakes appearing, but in the context of each activity, the number of them was quite low, or lower than it could be expected. The simple reason for this is that the students

were concerned with one specific item of the form at a time, and the main activity was always preceded by other activities that were designed to prevent the students from making the mistake further. Therefore the individual activities do not prove whether or not the whole process was successful. One more reason for this is the fact that the reflection of individual activities considered the students' performance only in the course of the particular activity. (But it is obvious that it is not possible to reflect on one particular activity considering the students' performance from the preceding activity.) Therefore it reflected only a short-term ability not to make the particular mistake. But the aim of re-teaching is not doing it 'for the moment', but to prove that the process was successful, it is necessary to prove that it has an effect for a longer period of time.

Considering all the activities as a whole, at first sight, it could appear that since all the activities were quite successful, the overall success of the whole process is evident. However, even consideration of the specific findings of each reflection indicates that there remained some mistakes that occurred within all activities. Even in the last activity, it was possible to notice the omission of the auxiliary verb, or the -ing ending of the participle. Although it was not very frequent, it appeared. In order to (dis)prove whether the activities brought a positive effect, the students were asked to complete the final comparison test ([App. 10](#)). The comparison of this test with the corresponding part of the diagnostic test ([App. 9](#)), which was applied at the beginning of the project, shows the result. (Note: The final test includes the same exercises and items as the part of the diagnostic test that is dealing with the PC.) The scores of individual students in the diagnostic test for items dealing with PC are recorded in [Chart 5 \(App. 11\)](#) and the scores of individual students in the comparison test are recorded in [Chart 6 \(App. 11\)](#). I compared these two sets of data for individual students. (Note: for this comparison, the data of students who did not completed both diagnostic and comparison test were excluded). Firstly, I counted the number of students who reached better score, separately for each of the two exercises as well as of the total score for both exercises (this is recorded in [Chart 8 \(App. 11\)](#)). This shows that 9 of 12 students (which is 75 %) reached better score in exercise 5 (referring to exercise 1 in the comparison test), 8 out of 12 students (about 66 %) in exercise 6 (referring to exercise 2 in comparison test), and in total 9 out of 12 students (75 %) reached better score than in the diagnostic test.

The number of better, same and worse scores is shown in [Chart 9 \(App. 11\)](#) and the percentage of the same in [Chart 10 \(App. 9\)](#). However, these numbers count every little improvement; even reaching 0 points in the diagnostic test compared to reaching 1 point in the comparison test is counted as positive improvement. The next step in the comparison was counting the score difference for individual students for each exercise and again for both together. This is recorded in [Chart 11 \(App. 11\)](#). The total score difference over 5 points, which would be a satisfactory result, was reached by 3 students only and it should be noted that these students reached 0 (or 1) points in the diagnostic test, which makes this result irrelevant, because it cannot be proved whether the students did not have enough time to complete the items in the diagnostic test, or whether they missed it for different reason, or whether they really did not know any solution. When the average score difference was counted, it was only 1 point for each exercise and 2 points in total, which is not a satisfactory result and only supports the irrelevance of the three top score differences. Going back to analysing the score difference (as shown in [Chart 11 \(App. 11\)](#)) and excluding the irrelevant data (3 students with improvement about more than 5 points in total), the data show that 6 students, which is precisely a half, reached from 1 to 4 points more in the final comparison test. It may seem quite nice, but it is not satisfactory because it is a number out of 10 points. Further it even shows that 3 students (which is one fourth) reached less points than in the diagnostic test. This analysis shows that not much improvement was gained. When I looked at the comparison of the average score reached in the diagnostic and comparison test, the numbers (recorded in [Chart 7 \(App. 11\)](#)) showed that the average score for the first exercise was 1.1 point (almost 22 %) better in the final test, for the second exercise 1 point (almost 21 %) better in the final test and in total, the average score was 2.2 points (21 %) better in the final test. Considered as a whole, the average improvement was not more than a fifth counting it either for the two exercises individually, or together. This analysis shows that not much improvement was reached, although some minor steps forward can be noticed.

The question is why the result is rather unsatisfactory when the individual activities showed quite a good performance of the students. This has probably several causes – the first is that not all the language of students during the activities was

recorded and analysed in the way as the diagnostic and the final tests were, so the impression of the activities could, and probably was, better than it would be if everything produced by the students would be recorded and analysed. The next reason for the difference between the partial results and the final analysis is the fact that the students' performance could be better after a series of sequent activities aimed at the same language item and the positive effect of this worked for quite a short-term only. Combination of the analysis of the tests and of the reasoning the difference suggests that some minor progress was reached by using the activities, but this cannot be considered as a long-term effect. The time period between the diagnostic and the final test was two months; in the meantime I did the individual activities with the students. I did them with a pause for one week minimally, so that the results of the activities would not be affected by the previous activities. Sometimes the pause had to be longer due to particular situation at school. At the end, the final test was not applied just after the last activity, so that it could not be influenced by the short-term effect of the activity. In my opinion, the pauses worked quite well for this purpose.

The results of the project indicate that the remedial work is a subject for a long term and that it may take a very long time to achieve satisfactory results in reducing the occurrence of a particular mistake. To achieve more specific results, further development of the project would be required. Firstly, it would be probably necessary to repeat the same comparison test once again after some time to see whether or not the students would achieve at least the same scores as at the end of this project. And there is a possibility that they would achieve better scores. This could work according to Green (In: Beaton 1990, p.43) who states that "there needs to be an incubation time period in which the learner acquires a feel for the rule". This means that after some time the student is familiar with the particular rule, or form, and the mistake cease to occur, or only as a slip, or as a result of carelessness. But still, there is the question of the time needed for the 'incubation'. However, it might be very difficult to identify, or even measure, this time, because it may vary in dependence on the level of difficulty of the particular language item and on the nature of individual students. Again, this would be a subject for further study. To return to the original question of further development of the project, the next step, if the second comparison test would not show any further

improvement, or would even show a setback, another re-teaching process would be started. It should be noted that similarly to the condition of using different activities and approach than in the initial teaching activity (Norrish 1990, p. 97), in the on-going remedial procedure other different activities and strategies should be used. This is to avoid the possibility of influence of the particular activity on learning and to provide a range of approaches to fit the different learning styles of the students.

The subject of mistakes and remedial work is an interesting sphere to be developed further and would be surely worth concerning. It would be very engaging and challenging for me, and hopefully for someone else, to follow up with the project in a longer period of time and to monitor the further progress and its possible long-term effect, to find out how long it would take to bring such an effect, or whether or not it is actually possible to eliminate the deep-seated mistakes absolutely.

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List of abbreviations:

PC	Present Continuous tense
PS	Present Simple tense
S(s)	student(s)
T	teacher

List of appendices:

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